



Communicating to Your Decision Makers:



Introduction	
<i>Purpose</i>	<p>This guide will help you better understand how to meet the needs of your community by communicating effectively to decision makers. This is best achieved by understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the local individual(s) or group(s) that oversee and make decisions affecting your wastewater treatment plant and collection system. • How to effectively communicate your needs to the decision makers.
<i>Target Audience</i>	<p>This guide is intended for owners, operators and decision makers of all Publicly Owned Treatment Work's (POTWs) or tribal systems with a treatment capacity of less than 5 Million Gallons per Day (MGD).</p>

General Responsibilities of Decision Makers	
<p>Decision makers play a significant role in ensuring that your entire wastewater treatment system is operating efficiently, is in compliance with its NPDES permit, and that the short-term and long-term financial needs are adequately addressed.</p>	
<i>Financial Responsibilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and approve annual budgets and monitor annual spending. • Make financial decisions to ensure your system has sufficient funds to meet current and future needs. • Acquire and approve financing for infrastructure repairs or upgrades. • Acquire and approve financing to enhance system security. • Acquire and set aside funding for operator training and certification.
<i>Managerial Responsibilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire and supervise system staff. • Set staff policy and job descriptions. • Set and provide guidance on system policies. • Determine the long-term goals for the system. • Resolve staff conflicts and address staff needs or complaints.
<i>Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the community informed of the current status of the system, upcoming projects, rate setting, staffing changes and any other key decisions. • Serve as a liaison between system staff and the community. • Ensure that the community is aware of the system's emergency response procedures.

Communicating Effectively with Decision Makers
<p>In order to ensure that the decision makers understand the technical side of the utility and the legal requirements to meet the NPDES permit, regular communication should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal meetings or presentations for requests for new equipment or rate changes • Monthly discharge monitoring reports (DMRs) and Monthly Report of Operation (MRO) • Annual reporting requirements and permit fees • Daily or weekly e-mail updates • Phone calls for updates on specific issues or to get information • Weekly memos with system status updates

When preparing for a discussion, bring supporting documentation.	
<i>Asset Management Plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate that the POTW is utilizing an Asset Management Plan. • Show how the POTW has or can benefit from the <u>free</u> TEAMS and CUPSS asset management software for small community systems. (see links below for more information).
<i>Infrastructure Upgrade</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring operational and maintenance records to the meeting with decision makers. • Obtain cost estimates from reputable vendors. • Establish an equipment replacement schedule. • Establish a reserve fund.
<i>Security System Upgrade</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain why the wastewater system is vulnerable to security breaches and its consequences. • Explain how an upgrade will address these issues.
<i>Rate Increase</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring documentation outlining the impact of past rate increases on your system. • Demonstrate how the rate increase will help your system to continue to provide the appropriate level of service. • Bring estimates of the percent of medium household income the rate increase reflects.
Tailor your presentation according to the topic and the audience.	
<i>New or Inexperienced Decision Makers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly describe the wastewater system, your experience, and your training. • Explain technical terms when talking to decision makers. • Invite decision makers to the plant.
<i>Understand Competing Demands</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn what other funding needs exist in the community. • Explain how your project will protect public health, benefit the community and the environment.
Give decision makers the information they need to state your case to the community.	
<i>Improve Communication with Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide non-technical, straightforward reasoning that they can repeat to the community. • Explain how your proposal will help your system protect community public health and meet regulatory requirements under the NPDES permit.
Work with decision makers to develop solutions that everyone can agree on.	
<i>Build Respect</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring operational and maintenance records to the meeting and back-up documents of the system needs. • Work to understand decision makers' priorities and opinions and help them to understand your own. • Realize that decision makers may not always be able to accommodate your suggestions, especially if decision makers must make community-wide funding decisions.
<i>Understand Common Goals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember that decision makers are working towards finding solutions that are in the best interest of the community. • Build a strong working relationship with decision makers so that you can work together to achieve your ultimate goal of protecting the environment and public health.

For additional information:

Visit the EPA Wastewater in Small Communities website at:

<http://www.epa.gov/owm/mab/smcomm/index.htm> or contact your state regulatory agency.

Also visit these areas of the EPA Office of Wastewater Management website:

[Tools for Small Communities](#)

[Municipalities and wastewater treatment plants: Fact sheets and outreach materials](#)

[NPDES- Municipalities and wastewater treatment plants: Overview](#)

[Water quality and technology based permitting](#)

And the Rural Community Assistance Partnership:

<http://www.rcap.org/>